

25. *Warren on the Birds in the Natal Museum.*

[First Report of the Natal Government Museum. Year ending 31st December, 1904. Pietermaritzburg, 1906.]

The new Director, Dr. Ernest Warren, is able to give a good account of the progress of the Natal Government Museum since its removal into its present quarters in 1894. He devotes the first portion of his Report to a description of the various rooms and of the collections which they contain, and gives many illustrations of the different departments. The second portion of the Report contains catalogues of some of the collections, amongst which is one of the "Birds, Birds'-nests, and Eggs." The mounted specimens of Birds are arranged in one series, according to Dr. Bowdler Sharpe's classification, and consist principally of South-African and British specimens. It is, no doubt, necessary to have a more or less complete General Collection, but the Natal Museum should, in our opinion, also have a special series of the native birds of the Colony either mounted or in skins, and this we hope will be provided in due course.

Dr. Warren has also started a new Journal ('Annals of the Natal Government Museum'), of which we have seen the first number (vol. i. part i.). "It will deal almost entirely with South-African matters—Geological, Zoological, Botanical, and Ethnological."

VIII.—*Letters, Notes and Extracts.*

WE have received the following letters addressed "To the Editors of 'The Ibis'" :—

SIRS,—As you ask me for any personal evidence that I can give as to the habits of the Honey-guide, I send you the following particulars :—

In September 1905 I made the journey from Umtali to Melsetter, walking along the beaten track, accompanied by seven or eight natives. At one place I saw a small bird about the size of a Lark apparently following my party, and occasionally perching on the trees near the road. I asked one of

the natives what bird it was, and he told me that its native name was "Inhalalala," and said that it was the bird that shewed people where there was honey. I stopped the natives and told them that I wished to see the honey found. The bird immediately started into the bush, and I went with two natives to follow it. After we had walked for about half a mile into the bush, I saw it perch on a tree in which there was a hole in a broken branch. The natives now collected some dry grass and set it on fire, and, ascending the tree, thrust it into the hole in order to suffocate the bees. After this they proceeded to enlarge the hole and to extract the honey. The honey consisted of four or five dark combs, which the natives put into a bit of a broken cooking-pot. A portion of the honey-comb was left on an adjacent branch of the tree for the bird, which returned to it before we had got far away.

I am, Sirs, yours &c.,

A. L. SCLATER.

Helvetia, South Melsetter,
Rhodesia,
June 1906.

SIRS,—I have translated for a Russian sporting periodical ('Psovaia e Rujcinaia Okhota') Mr. Einar Lönnberg's description of *Tetrao urogallus lugens* from the April number of 'The Ibis' (1906, p. 317). Now the well-known taxidermist of Moscow, Mr. Th. K. Lorenz, gives (in No. 22 of the above-named periodical) his account of this bird. As he has been engaged during the last quarter of a century in collecting materials concerning the palaearctic Gallinae, and as many railway-wagon-loads of Siberian and Russian game-birds pass yearly through his hands (Moscow being the centre of this trade), his opinion is of some value.

Mr. Lorenz informs me that he has had through his hands scores of Capercaillies of the "*lugens*" form from different parts of Russia: North (Governments of Arkhangel and Vologda), East (Perm), and Central (Vladimir, Nijny-Novgorod, &c.). Some were young, with very soft

bones, some quite old. But *all* of them had the sexual organs quite irregularly developed—not quite masculine nor feminine, yet not clearly hermaphroditic, so that they might be called asexual specimens.

Mr. Lorenz adds that such anomalous specimens were considered by Dr. A. B. Meyer to be hybrids between *Tetrao urogallus* (male) and *Lyrurus tetrix* (female); but Mr. Lorenz denies that such hybrids exist, and thinks that Dr. Meyer made an erroneous conjecture, not having examined the state of the sexual organs of his specimens.

Perhaps you will find these remarks sufficiently interesting for your readers.

Yours &c.,

S. A. BUTURLIN.

Wesenberg, Esthonia, Russia,
October 13th, 1906.

SIRS,—During this winter I am camping out in one of the largest areas of untouched forest-land that still remain in New Zealand. Unfortunately for its birds a great slice of 3000 acres is being felled by the owner this season, and I am engaged in superintending the felling.

The altitude is from 2000 to 3000 feet, and the position is in the middle portion of the eastern extension of the North Island which ends in East Cape, and is some fifty miles from the coast. I may say that other owners in the locality are felling trees, and next year I expect that a still larger area will go down. This will seriously affect the feathered inhabitants, and I have taken notes of the birds that I have observed here.

My daily visits to different gangs of men bring me in touch with many of our rarest birds. *Miro australis* and *Glitonyx albicilla* greet me almost every day, as does the Bell-bird (*Anthornis melanura*). The Parrot family are exceedingly abundant and *Glaucoptis* is quite common. About our scrap-heap at the galley-door the Rifleman (*Acanthidositta chloris* or *A. citrina*?) hunts for food, and its “chit”-like call (which resembles that of an insect rather

than that of a bird) is to be heard all through this heavily-timbered country.

If they are likely to prove acceptable, I propose to forward to you some notes on the birds that I have observed here, and thus give ornithologists an idea of the scarcity of bird-life even in the wildest of the New Zealand forest-districts in the present day.

I am, Sirs, yours &c.,

J. C. McLEAN.

Te Karaka, Gisborne,
New Zealand.
July 29th, 1906.

[We shall be glad to receive Mr. McLean's notes. See his former contributions in 1889, 1892, and 1894.—EDD.]

SIRS,—I have been greatly interested in reading of the occurrence of *Totanus melanoleucus* in the Scilly Islands (Bull. B. O. C. xix. p. 7). This makes, I think, the eighth species of American Wader obtained in those islands, some of which have occurred more than once; while if the counties of Devonshire and Cornwall be added, we shall have a list of eleven species of American Waders that have occurred on these coasts, comprising a total of twenty-four individuals. Several of these species have also reached the coasts of Sussex and Kent. Besides the examples recorded from time to time, many others must have been overlooked. Surely this is a most significant fact, and one that should cause British ornithologists to receive the occurrences of American birds other than Waders (such as *Turdus migratorius* and *Dendroica aestiva*) with less suspicion than has hitherto been the case.

Personally I cannot believe that a quarter of the number of American birds recorded in the British Islands can have received "assisted passages." Such a thing as an "assisted passage," for Waders at least, is an impossibility, as these birds, apart from the fact that they seldom settle on ships, could not obtain any food by doing so, and would surely die long before the ship reached England or Ireland.

On the other hand, that they set out from America with the *intention* of proceeding eastward is quite obvious: how otherwise is the presence of so many of these birds on the east coast of England to be accounted for? It seems most unlikely that they would make their way round the coast and turn *northward* on reaching Dover.

As time goes on and more interest (*if possible!*) is taken in these so-called "stragglers," I feel convinced that, provided there are a sufficient number of observers on the west coasts of Ireland and England, many species of American birds will be found to arrive on those coasts every autumn. This is, of course, chiefly supposition, though it is borne out somewhat by facts; and the question may well be asked—Why do these American birds migrate eastward? But it might also be asked, why does Richards's Pipit cross Asia and appear in such numbers on Heligoland?

I am, Sirs, yours &c.,

MICHAEL J. NICOLL.

Zoological Gardens,
Giza, Egypt,
November 9th, 1906.

SIRS,—In the last number of 'The Ibis' (1906, p. 704), under the heading *Tringa subarquata*, Mr. M. J. Nicoll writes as follows:—"The example obtained (a female) was just assuming the breeding-plumage *by moult*, but the new feathers on the mantle are *black* with no sign of any rufous on them. This colour on these feathers must therefore be due to an infusion of colouring pigment or some other form of *colour-change*, as it is not possible that the breeding-plumage could be assumed by a *double moult*."

The conclusion reached by Mr. Nicoll, whether it was based upon this single specimen or upon an examination of a larger number, is not borne out by the following facts:—

(1) A number of skins of the Curlew-Sandpiper shot by myself in Spain in the months of April and May, and others in the British Museum, collected in spring in various countries, have (*a*) in the males all the new feathers on the

mantle in whatever stages of growth they may be, even when only just breaking from the sheath, brilliantly coloured with red; and (*b*) in the females, in many cases, feathers on the mantle in the same condition, except that the red colouring is not usually so brilliant as in the males.

(2) Mr. Nicoll's specimen (which I have examined) has not completed its moult, and new rufous-marked feathers would, I think, have grown subsequently if the bird had lived. This is the more probable because there are two or three feathers on the mantle marked with rufous, which possibly escaped Mr. Nicoll's observation owing to their being covered by the long fringes of other feathers.

(3) Like that of many other Waders, especially in the female birds, the spring-moult of the Curlew-Sandpiper is often arrested for a period, and is then resumed, so that a partially-moulted bird which shews no moult in progress may subsequently grow more summer-feathers and lose more winter ones.

(4) The female Curlew-Sandpiper, although sometimes attaining almost the brilliancy of the male in summer-plumage, is more often much less vividly coloured and not infrequently has no rufous colouring on the mantle. A female shot August 12th is an example; it is beginning its autumnal moult, and the old summer-feathers on the mantle are marked with black and have no more red than Mr. Nicoll's bird, which would be exactly like it when the grey edgings of its new feathers were worn off.

To shew the danger of basing a conclusion as to the processes of moult upon a few specimens, I may mention that a female Curlew-Sandpipers in my own collection and four others in the British Museum, taken in the months of May, June, and July, are in various stages of moult, but the new feathers are like the old winter-feathers. In other words, these birds have for some reason—connected, no doubt, with the condition of the bird—failed to grow any proper summer-feathers, but have grown new winter-feathers instead. Mr. Nicoll's bird is not in this case, but is growing summer-feathers marked with black but not with red—a plumage

which forms, as I have shown above, in some cases the full summer-dress of a female Curlew-Sandpiper.

Yours &c.,

HARRY F. WITHERBY.

11 Hereford Mansions, Hereford Road,
London, W.,
November 29th, 1906.

The following letter from Mr. D. Carruthers to Selater is dated "Entebbe, Uganda, Sept. 6th, 1906" :—

"As our expedition has now finished its work on Ruwenzori, and I am just starting off on another expedition, I write to tell you of my plans.

"We effected a complete circuit of the whole range of Ruwenzori and made permanent collecting-camps at different points. On the western side we could not do much on the mountains because of hostile native tribes, but we were there long enough to see that there was not much different from what we had already got on the eastern side. We passed through a bit of the Congo Territory on our journey, and saw that there was a great deal of work yet to be done in those parts. So two members of our party are going back there, namely Messrs. Woosnam and Dent, while Mr. Wollaston and I are preparing to make a journey across to the West Coast. This will take us about seven months, and we ought to get a valuable collection on the way.

"Our route will take us across Uganda to Lake Albert Edward and thence south to Lake Tanganyika, while on the way we shall make a special exploration of the great volcano situated at the north end of Lake Kivu. We shall then strike west until we reach the Congo waters, and follow that river down to its mouth. We shall cover a large bit of country and ought to get good results. If, however, Woosnam and Dent also return home *via* the Congo Free State, they intend to take a line much further north than ours. Our combined collections ought to be thoroughly illustrative of the Fauna of the Congo Basin.

"I shall devote myself to the birds and mammals, and Wollaston will collect the plants, butterflies, and beetles.

Our collection up to the present includes in all 2665 specimens of birds and mammals.

“ I am now in Entebbe preparing for the journey, and we hope to start in a few days.”

Report on the British Museum, 1906.—The Parliamentary Report on the British Museum for 1906 contains an account of the accessions to the Collection of Birds made during the year 1905, which were 13,834 in number. The following acquisitions are stated to be worthy of special notice:—109 birds from the West Indies, presented by Mr. D. A. Bannerman; 162 birds from British Central Africa, presented by Sir Alfred Sharpe, K.C.B.; 52 birds from South-west Australia (including examples of 5 species new to the Collection), presented by Dr. Bernard Woodward; 10 birds from the Azores, presented by the Ponta Delgada Museum; 745 birds from Dr. Selater's collection, purchased; 15 birds from the Belgian Congo, presented by Colonel J. J. Harrison; 98 eggs from Australia, presented by Mr. A. J. North; 64 birds from Wales and Ireland, presented by Mr. W. R. Ogilvie-Grant; 1279 birds and 868 eggs from Egypt and other countries, bequeathed by the late Mr. Edward Cavendish Taylor; 322 birds from Japan, presented by His Grace the Duke of Bedford, K.G.; 335 birds from the Kauri-Kachin District and 1260 birds from Mount Victoria, Chin Hills, presented by Lt.-Col. Rippon; 72 birds from the Tian-Shan Mountains, presented by Mr. A. B. Bayley Worthington; 417 eggs from British East Africa and Uganda, purchased; 208 birds from the Chindwin Hills, presented by Capt. A. Mears; 88 birds from the Syrian Desert, collected by Mr. D. Carruthers, purchased; 906 birds and 715 eggs from Paraguay, collected by Mr. W. Foster, purchased; 954 mounted birds from various localities, presented by Lord Tweedmouth; 416 birds from South Tibet, presented by Capt. H. J. Walton, I.M.S.; 232 birds from Benguela, collected by Dr. W. J. Ansorge, purchased; 236 birds from Apo Volcano, Mindanao, Philippines, including the types of

7 new species and 19 species new to the Collection, collected by Mr. W. Goodfellow, purchased; 450 birds from the Wagga Mountains, Somali-land, collected by Mr. G. W. Bury, purchased; 450 birds, mostly from the Canary Islands, presented by Mr. E. G. B. Meade-Waldo; 374 birds from S.W. Australia, collected by Mr. T. Shortridge, presented by Mr. W. E. Balston; 396 birds from Persia, collected by Mr. R. B. Woosnam, presented by Col. Bailward; 326 birds from Cameroons, West Africa, collected by Mr. G. L. Bates, purchased; and 18 Silver Pheasants from Upper Burma, received in exchange from the Bombay Natural History Society.

The chief points in the progress made with the General Collection of Birds are described in the Report as follows:—

“Considerable progress has been made with the re-mounting of the British Birds for the pier-cases in the Pavilion and among the series in the General Gallery.

“Descriptive printed labels have been placed in all the cases containing the nesting series of British Birds, and framed tablets, shewing the classification adopted, have been placed at intervals in the Gallery. Progress has been made with the Osteological Collection, and a large number of the eggs of the species included in Volume V. of the ‘Catalogue of Birds’ have been incorporated.

“The arrangement and cataloguing of the skeletons of the Tracheophone Passeres, Pterotochidæ, Conopophagidæ, Formicariidæ, and Dendrocolaptidæ have been proceeded with.

“The collection of birds in spirits has also been overhauled, but cannot be perfectly arranged until better accommodation has been provided.

“A case illustrative of the parasitic habit in birds has been installed in the North Hall, near the one containing eggs of the Common Cuckoo. In the same neighbourhood have been placed some photographs illustrating the manner in which young Cuckoos eject the rightful occupants of the nest they usurp, and also a label describing the nesting-habits of the Cuckoos.”

New Expedition to Katanga.—Mr. S. A. Neave, of Magdalen College, Oxford, of whose travels and collections in North-east Rhodesia we gave a short account in our last number ('Ibis,' 1906, p. 740), has arranged to accompany another expedition which is shortly leaving for Northern Rhodesia, and hopes to continue his ornithological and other zoological work in that country. The chief object of this expedition is to explore the Katanga Copper District in the Congo Free State, and thence it will probably pass along the water-parting of the Congo and Zambesi Rivers towards the Angola frontier, following more or less the line of the proposed new railway. This ought to be a very interesting country to the zoologist, its fauna being as yet very little known.

Mr. Neave's account of the birds which he collected in North-eastern Rhodesia has gone to press, and will be shortly published in the 'Notes' of the Manchester Museum.

Canon Tristram's last Collection of Birds.—We learn from 'Science' that the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia has acquired the *last* Collection of Birds made by the late Canon Tristram, numbering some 7000 skins and representing upwards of 3000 species. It will be recollected that Canon Tristram's original Collection (of 20,000 specimens) was acquired by the Free Public Museums of Liverpool in 1896 (see 'Ibis,' 1906, p. 605), immediately after which, we believe, Canon Tristram began collecting again.

The Tschusi Collection of Palearctic Birds.—This valuable collection, probably the most complete of its kind on the Continent, has recently been acquired by the Vienna Museum of Natural History. It consists of about 6000 beautifully-prepared skins, and has been accumulated during the last thirty years by one who had a clear understanding of the great importance of well-ascertained localities. Nearly every species of the Western Palearctic Region is represented by series of specimens illustrating its distribution, as well

as its individual and geographical variation, in a full and satisfactory manner. The Collection is particularly rich in birds from various parts of the Austrian Empire, many of which were collected by Ritter von Tschusi himself. The genera *Cinclus*, *Ruticilla*, *Budytes*, *Motacilla*, *Anthus*, *Linaria*, *Lanius*, and *Nucifraga* are especially well represented. The gem, however, is a very full series of the two species of Marsh-Tits (*Parus palustris* and *Parus montanus*) from all parts of their range. The types of the forty-two geographical forms lately described by Ritter von Tschusi are another important feature in the Collection.—[C. E. H.]

New "British Birds."—The number of stragglers from "foreign parts" recorded as occurring in these Islands seems to be decidedly on the increase, owing mainly, we suppose, to the careful look-out now kept for them by the increasing number of observers, especially on our southern coasts. Without including "subspecies" and "doubtfuls," no less than fourteen additional species may now be registered as "occasional visitants" to the British Islands. Their names are given in the subjoined list, which has been kindly revised for us by Mr. Howard Saunders. It will be observed that eleven of them are Palearctic species, and that only three are of American origin.

1. *Turdus fuscatus* (Bull. B. O. C. xvi. p. 45).
2. *Pratincola maura* (Bull. xvi. p. 10).
3. *Phylloscopus tristis* (Bull. xix. p. 18).
4. *Cettia sericea* (Bull. xiv. p. 84).
5. *Lanius nubicus* (Bull. xvi. p. 22).
6. *Hirundo rufula* (Bull. xix. p. 18).
7. *Chrysomitris citrinella* (Zool. 1905, p. 71).
8. *Montifringilla nivalis* (Bull. xv. p. 58).
9. *Emberiza cia* (Bull. xiii. p. 38).
10. *Emberiza aureola* (Bull. xvi. p. 10).
11. *Junco hyemalis* (Irish Nat. xv. p. 137).
12. *Tringa bairdi* (Bull. xi. p. 27).
13. *Totanus melanoleucus* (Bull. xix. p. 7).
14. *Puffinus kuhli* (Bull. xvi. p. 71).